

"HISTORY OF THE ROYAL SAPPERS AND MINERS, FROM THE
FORMATION OF THE CORPS IN MARCH 1772 TO THE DATE WHEN
ITS DESIGNATION WAS CHANGED TO THAT OF ROYAL ENGINEERS,
IN OCTOBER 1856."

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"...On the 25th October was fought the memorable cavalry combat at Balaklava. Sergeant Joseph Morant and six privates, having in charge thirty Turkish arabas drawn by sixty bullocks, had nearly passed the valley with the train when the fight commenced. The escort was moving to the port for stores, and several of the waggons still within the boundary of the battlefield, were swept and pierccd by shots from the Russian artillery. As this was no place for a cumbersome train of conveyances, Morant and his men goaded and whooped on the oxen to Balaklava; and speedily loading the arabas, returned, after the action, to the engineer park in front of Sebastopol. These seven sappers and eleven others who were in the vicinity of the battle, were honoured with the distinction of the Balaklava clasp.

There was only one sapper actually engaged in the battle. Sir Colin Campbell, anticipating an attack, ordered an able sapper to be sent to the Turkish redoubts to superintend any repairs that might be needed. Sergeant Dickson despatched private James Lancaster for the duty. At five o'clock on the evening of the 24th, he arrived at No. 4 redoubt, situated close under the hills of the plateau where the corps d'observation of General Bosquet was

encamped. All night Lancaster worked with the Turks in strengthening the faces of the redoubt; and in the morning stretched himself in a shallow trench to take a little sleep. He had not long covered himself with a tarpaulin - a cold substitute for a blanket - when the Russians attacked No. 1 redoubt, which was a considerable distance from No. 4. Instantly awakened by some Turks, who seemingly wanted an Englishman to keep alive in them the little valour they possessed, he was quickly among them. There was also a British artilleryman in the redoubt, with whom the sapper, sharing the kin of country, behaved as became their national prestige. While the cannonading was doing its work on No. 1, a Russian battery pushed up to a height opposite No. 4, and opened its guns on No. 3. The attack was sharp, but the Turks wanting spirit and firmness, made a weak defence, and fled from the fort. In time Nos. 1, 2, and 3 were taken. When the guns in No. 3 were silenced, the Russian lottery increased its fire on No. 4, which answering with an energy probably emboldened by the nearness of supports, checked the enemy in his career of success; and though No. 4 might easily have been captured, it escaped the fate which sealed the others. It is due to the gallantry of the Turks in No. 4 to acknowledge that while many of the infantry vaulted in alarm over the parapet at the first blush of the fight, and ran from the opportunity to cover themselves with honour, there were not wanting staunch artillerists, firm and courageous, to stand to the guns; and, as instructed by the British gunner, to work them manfully. The Pasha in command was an old but a brave officer, and his worst trouble was to beat back the flying Turks to join in the defence. The enemy now commenced another movement by collecting on the heights overlooking the plain between the redoubts, the whole strength of his cavalry - a solid menacing body, which in its heaviness threatened that day to strike a decisive blow. Meanwhile the Turks in No. 4, regarding any display of courage on their part as useless, and their position untenable, withdrew the two guns to the rear, halting them on the crest of a slope; and after spiking the ordnance and breaking the spokes of the wheels and the shafts of the carriages, tumbled them into the valley. The garrison then retired to the position where the Highlanders were drawn up. The artilleryman and sapper stood by the Turks to the last, but in the retreat each took a different direction. While sitting in the valley a short distance from the redoubt, Lords Lucan and Cardigan with their staff galloped up to the sapper, and grouped round him. Learning the cause of his presence there, he was asked what he knew of the attack. Lancaster answered to the effect that two of the forts had already been taken, and the others, having been abandoned, would, he feared, soon follow. Away rode the commanders and the staff; the trumpets sounded, and removing the cavalry behind a mound, soon after occurred those cavalry dispositions, and that extraordinary conflict, which prevented the Russians from

pouring into Balaklava, and capturing the great base of the allied operations. Private Lancaster succeeded in making good his retreat, under a heavy fire, without mischance."